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SUBJECT: Niger: Opposition November 22 Rally in Niamey

Ref: a) Niamey 826 b) Niamey 630 c) Niamey 618

¶1. Summary: On November 22, the Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR) organized a rally in Niamey to demand that President Tandja step down on December 22, the end of his term of office under the constitution of the 5th Republic, which was supplanted by that of the 6th Republic by means of the August 4 referendum. The CFDR also used the event to affirm its support for ECOWAS' mediation of Niger's political crisis and expressed its willingness to negotiate with the Government of Niger (GON). End summary.

#### 3,000 Rally to Demand President Tandja Step Down

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¶2. On November 22, one month before the end of President Tandja's second and last term in office under the constitution of the 5th Republic, over 3,000 protesters gathered in Niamey to demand that President Tandja step down from power on December 22. President Tandja, who otherwise would be leaving office in December, obtained a three-year extension via a controversial August 4 referendum that ushered in a new constitution, establishing the 6th Republic. During the rally, Bazoum Mohamed, Vice President of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), delivered the CFDR's keynote remarks, which stated that "the Nigerien people would have been at the eve of a major event - that of a democratic alternation in power, within a context of social peace...with legitimate pride to have taken, year after year since 1999, decisive actions in building democracy and the rule of law. Unfortunately, one man's megalomania...led him to throw us into an unprecedented political and social crisis...Therefore, our struggle is just, because it aims to restore the rule of law, basic freedoms, and constitutional legality provided by the fundamental law of August 9, 1999." Members of the opposition vowed to put an end to the current "autocratic drive" and noted that after December 22, President Tandja would lose legitimacy.

#### Opposition Welcomes ECOWAS Role, Mediator

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¶3. At the same time, the CFDR reminded supporters that it had responded to ECOWAS mediator former Nigerian head of state General Abdul Salami Abubakar's call for consultations and declared that it "favorably welcomed the mediation engaged by ECOWAS and believes that this is the final opportunity to broker peace in Niger, and that President Tandja and his clan would be wrong to spurn it." He added, "We are determined to accompany the mediator's efforts in finding a way out of the crisis based on dialogue and respect for the rule of law and democratic principles."

#### GON: No Return to 5th Republic in Cards

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¶4. Responding to the CFDR's statement, the GON Minister of Communication and Government Spokesperson, Moctar Kassoum, indicated

in a BBC Hausa interview on November 22 that returning to the 5th Republic (Note: the one based on the August 1999 constitution. End note.) would be out of the question, and that the GON would not back down.

Comment:

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¶5. The CFDR's rally, which occurred immediately after the ECOWAS mediator's departure from Niger, took place while three key opposition figures - Mahamadou Issoufou, Mahamane Ousmane, and Hama Amadou - embarked on missions to gain international support in Paris, New York, and Paris, respectively. The rally proceeded peacefully, without violence or arrests. End comment.

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